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Abdulhay, Husain

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# Iranian EFL Regular University Students' Motivational Beliefs by 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

Husain Abdulhay

Payame Noor University of Qom, Iran

Corresponding Author: husainabdolhay@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT.** Poking about the motivational beliefs of EFL learners across different graders is felt en route to monitoring their outlooks for waging into any actual learning. To do so, the study sought to ascertain the effect of grade levels on the motivational beliefs of Iranian EFL university students. A total of 202 Iranian EFL learners were examined for their self-efficacy and control of learning beliefs by dint of motivation subscales of Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire. Cross-sectional study was done for data collection and for means differences. Sophomores reported lower means for their motivational beliefs than other two graders. Third graders reported higher means than sophomores and seniors in all two variables. Fourth graders reported lower self-efficacy than other two graders. Furthermore, fourth graders reported a higher means for control of learning beliefs than sophomores. The findings corroborate former studies evidencing a tail-off in self-efficacy in higher graders.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is believed to play a major role in effectuating instigation of an action. However, it is patent in great deal that beliefs and motivation are liable to fluctuation as time elapses hinged upon learner passing through different experiences.

Self-efficacy and control of learning beliefs are two outstanding determinants of motivation which is subjected to the scrutiny in this study. These two lay in expectancy component of general model of motivation for self-regulated learning. Control of learning beliefs rests with self-efficacy beliefs as to keep self-efficacy steadfast for learners to persist and be unyielding to ever-present barriers and obstacles in a social environment of learning. Zimmerman (1995) encouraged researchers to broaden their horizons on self-regulation beyond metacognitive knowledge and skill to hold more inquiry into the role of self-efficacy in conducting the whole process of self-regulation.

Self-efficacy is accentuated as a potent and essential component of motivational belief, making learners persist in their activities. Bandura (1991) defines self-efficacy as peoples' judgments on their capabilities to successfully do an activity. Self-efficacy is a self-overhaul of one's ability for mastering a task. Self-efficacy includes judgments about one's ability to fulfill a task as well as one's own confidence in one's skills to perform that task.

Self-determination theory adheres to self-efficacy beliefs for decision-making and going into an action (Ryan and Deci, 2006). Bandura (1997) maintains that self-efficacy overrides other self-motivational beliefs by dint of validating the expectation of students' choice of activities, effort, and persistence.

Self-efficacy is considered as a mélange of beliefs congregated by experiences over the time. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is influenced by four sources of information called enactive or mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and psychological or emotional state. Enactive or mastery experience concerns with the imprint of past performance. Vicarious experience refers to observing or finding about other's triumphs or fiasco what is also called peer learning. Social/verbal persuasion includes self and others' encouragement and, last but not the least, psychological or emotional state which concerns with the perceived moods of individuals (ibid).

With this thought in mind that variances in motivation are not to be directly ascribed to individual's sex, gender differences were decentralized for the current study with reference to a great many studies in which motivational beliefs differences across gender were found not to be significant (Richard and Samuel, 2014; Tang & Neber, 2008; Prokop, Tuncer & Chuda, 2007). In pursuit of finding the differences among grade levels in terms of their motivational beliefs, these research questions were followed:

- 1) Is there a significant mean difference among 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students with respect to control of learning beliefs?
- 2) Is there a significant mean difference among 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students as for self-efficacy?
- 3) Is there a significant mean difference among 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students as for their motivational beliefs?

Null hypothesis rested on that there is no significant mean difference among 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students with respect to academic motivation, self-efficacy and control of learning beliefs.

## 2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Motivation subpart of Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (henceforth MSLQ) is further divided into three sections: *Value*, *expectancy* and *affective* components which contain 31 items, appraising students' goals and value beliefs in a course, their beliefs to pass a course, and their anxiety on tests in a course.

Expectancy components embrace students' beliefs that they can fulfill a task. Control of learning beliefs-cum-self-efficacy for learning and performance subscales of expectancy-related domain intend to assess students' for. *Control of learning beliefs* refers to learners' beliefs that success or failure in their studies depends on themselves. *Self-efficacy for learning and performance* explains the success expectancy and confidence in one's ability to perform the learning task.

Ongowo & Hungi (2014) carried out a non-experimental quantitative study to examine the impact of ethnicity, gender and grade level on the triads of motivational beliefs engulfing self-efficacy, intrinsic value and test-anxiety and self-regulation of 317 Kenyan Biology students, grade 10 through 12. Results of Post-hoc Tukey test unveiled significant differences in respect of internal value between graders 10 and 12 vis-a-vis grade 11 with both more favored than grade 11. Regarding test anxiety, grade 9 and grade 12 showed significant differences, with grade 9 and 12 more favored than 11. However, in re to self-regulation strategies, grade 12 favored than grade 9. The boys appeared more self-efficacious than girls. Gender differences reported not to be statistically significant in the study. The girls scored higher than boys on cognitive strategy and self-regulation. Grade 11 reported no significant differences for any of the variables under study. Concluding assumption of the research was that grade 12 students being matured in the academic process and more focused with personal goals appeared more self-regulated than the rest showing low test anxiety in biology classes.

Guvercin, Tekkaya & Sungur (2010) investigated the impacts of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels of elementary school students and their genders on motivation towards science learning (i.e. self efficacy, science learning value, achievement goal and performance goal). Grade level and gender had a significant effect on the collective dependent variables. Results revealed that students' motivation towards science learning dwindled with increase in grade levels and girls showed a higher motivation towards science learning than boys. 6<sup>th</sup> grade students appeared to be more self-efficacious and have more internal interest in science. There was a significant difference between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students' motivation towards science learning concerning mean scores on each motivational variable.

Gungoren, Savas (2009) evidenced the effect of grade levels of 900 Turkish elementary school students (grades 6 through 8) on their motivation by administering Turkish format of the Approaches to Learning Instrument (ALI). 6<sup>th</sup> grade students were found to be more self-efficacious in science and reported more internal interest in science and study science course. However, 7 graders felt more motivated than 8 graders. Meanwhile, study done by Azizoğlu and

Çetin (2009) evinced no statistically significant effect of grade level on students' motivation. Karaarslan, Guliz and Sungur, Semra (2011) run a study on grade level and gender differences across elementary students' self-efficacy in science and technology using Self efficacy towards Science and Technology Scale. No significant difference was documented across grade level and gender. Likewise, Leutwyler and Merki (2009) evidenced that gender played no role in mobilization self-efficacy and persistence.

### 3. METHOD

#### Research design

Cross-sectional study, using quantitative data collection and analysis, was executed throughout the study.

The current study was mobilized with intent to fathom whether students' perceptions of their motivational beliefs toward classroom studies were different among second, fourth, and fourth graders. Specifically, comparison was made across sophomores, juniors and seniors to control for the transitional course of time experienced by freshmen leaving behind high school and attending university. Freshman university students were not included in the present study to control for any possible covariates resulting from transitional course from school to university level.

#### Participants

A convenience sample of 202 university students, both male and female, from one state university in Kashan (n=108) and two universities in Qom, one private (n=51) and another state university (n=43), all majoring in EFL (English as a foreign language), comprised participants of this study. Sophomores (23.8%), juniors (39.6%), and seniors (36.6%) were subjects of the study in respect of their grade levels. No measurement of proficiency level was administered and the classrooms were dispersed in thirteen different subject domains.

#### Instrument

Subscales of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (henceforth MSLQ; Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991, 1993), *Self-efficacy and Control of Learning Beliefs*, using a 7-likert scale, were used to elicit participants' ratings on their motivational beliefs. All question items in the original questionnaire were used to find information on students' perception on their motivational beliefs. There were no negatively worded items in subscales used.

*Self-efficacy for learning and performance* scale is an 8-item to assess expectancy perceptions of success and confidence in one's ability to perform the learning task. Sample items include: "I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this class" and "I am confident I can learn the basic concepts taught in this course."

*Control of Learning Beliefs* scale is a 4-item subscale which measure learners' beliefs that success or failure in their studies is dependent on them of which an example is: "If I study in apposite ways, then I will be able to learn the material in this course." and "It is my own fault if I don't learn the material in this course".

A pilot study of 40 students was executed to discern the reliability of the shortened MSLQ instrument in English version applied to Iranian EFL university context. The reliability of the instrument was  $\alpha = .884$ , indicating a potent internal consistency. No items were negatively worded in the subscales of MSLQ.

#### 4. PROCEDURE

The data for the present study came from scores given to the packet of self-report survey administrated to some intact university classes in two different states in Iran. The surveys were distributed to the same participants in core courses in EFL with different teachers to avoid duplicative responses.

The effect of grade level either directly or indirectly as independent variables on all aspects of motivation will be determined by means comparison analysis.

Uniformity in the administration of the instrument was ensured through the same set of directions imparted by the same researcher in the classrooms, culminated in a 100% return rate for all students present during the data collection. Informing students that their teachers would not see their responses, the researcher endeavored to protect the confidentiality of the students and consequent bias effect. A convenience sampling was done enrolling 202 EFL students at university level.

*Data analysis.* Means and standard deviations of ratings by grade were used to reach conclusion. Students' ratings of motivation were compared across different grade levels. Sophomores, juniors and seniors were compared apropos of their means differences.

#### 5. RESULTS

Data were crunched by dint of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program 18.0. Basic descriptive statistics and means comparison were executed throughout the study. Three tables are going to enumerate the results. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics.

**Table 1.** Distribution of students in different grade levels

Grader	Number	Percent
Sophomore	48	23.8
Junior	80	39.6
Senior	74	36.6

Descriptive statistics such as grade levels and the corresponding numbers are presented in the table above.

#### Descriptive Statistics

In order to exam the null hypotheses, the statistical technique, viz. means comparison was used. Table 2 evinces the comparison of means apropos of *control of learning beliefs*.

**Table 2.**

Grader	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
2	17.8333	5.63927	.00000
3	19.0500	6.07527	.00000
4	18.7432	5.94740	.00000
Total	18.6485	5.91736	

#### *Control of learning beliefs*

The means and standard deviations of this variable can be found in Table 2. As indicated in the table 2, third-grade students appear to have scored higher ( $M = 19.05$ ,  $SD = 6.07$ ) than two other groups regarding control of learning beliefs. Fourth-grade students, however, scored higher ( $M = 18.74$ ,  $SD = 5.94$ ) than second graders ( $M = 17.83$ ,  $SD = 5.63$ ).

Table 3 evinces the comparison of means in re to *Self-efficacy for learning and performance*.

Grader	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
2	38.1250	10.87184	.00000
3	39.1750	9.27058	.00000
4	37.7432	12.39207	.00000
Total	38.4010	10.84456	

*Self-efficacy for learning and performance*

The means and standard deviations of this variable are showcased in Table 3. As indicated in the table 3, third-grade students appear to have scored higher ( $M = 39.17$ ,  $SD = 9.27$ ) than two other groups in terms of self-efficacy beliefs. However, second-grade students scored higher ( $M = 38.74$ ,  $SD = 10.87$ ) than fourth graders ( $M = 38.40$ ,  $SD = 10.84$ ).

Table 4 exhibits the comparison of means apropos of *motivational beliefs* (both control of learning beliefs and self-efficacy).

Grader	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
2	55.9583	13.66306	.00000
3	58.2250	13.76381	.00000
4	56.4865	16.63075	.00000
Total	57.0495	14.81587	

*Motivational beliefs*

The means and standard deviations of this composite variable can be observed in Table 4. As indicated in the table 4, third-grade students appear to have scored higher ( $M = 58.22$ ,  $SD = 13.76$ ) than two other groups concerning motivational beliefs. Like control of beliefs variable, fourth-grade students scored higher ( $M = 56.48$ ,  $SD = 16.63$ ) than second graders ( $M = 55.95$ ,  $SD = 13.66$ ).

## 6. DISCUSSION

Effect of grade level on students' motivational beliefs was probed. There it appeared to be discrepancies in students' ratings in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4th grades. Significant differences were observed between sophomores and seniors in respect of motivation. As for self-efficacy there it was seen a decline in sense of self-efficacy by fourth-graders than other two graders. However, two variables of the study were favored by third-graders more than sophomores and juniors all in all cases. Experience could be a major factor influencing third graders' perception of self-efficacy albeit decrease observed in that of fourth graders can be imputed to final course of year of study and reasons for study.

The current study denoted a significant difference between the academic grade levels in terms of motivation. While junior had the highest perception of motivational beliefs than sophomores and senior students both and senior students greater perception of control of learning beliefs than sophomores, the decline in the perception of self-efficacy seen through fourth to second year was statistically significant.

These findings corroborate with previous studies in this area. The current study denotes a decline in the perception of self-efficacy, such that students' self-efficacy declines during the academic years. Sophomores overtook juniors in the perception of their self-efficacy.

There may be attrition in motivation for some reasons. The peak in the motivation during the third year may have occurred for at least two reasons. First, perhaps the large sample of juniors who participated in this study and secondly, be the peak may correspond to garnered acquaintance to learning environment.

Decrease in perception of motivational beliefs can also be ascribed to the social bias of the students towards their teachers and consecutive self-reports. However, students' introduction to new situation and its Hawthorne effect, transition from school to university, tired to be diminished by not including freshmen into the study. Prior research suggests students experienced a decrease in their perceived motivational beliefs throughout their college years.

## 7. CONCLUSION

It was found that grade level influences Iranian EFL learners' motivation. The results evinced that the learners' self-efficacy beliefs on their consecutive college year continuum whittled away. Findings indicated that 4<sup>th</sup> grade students had lower self-efficacy than second and third graders. Findings implied that as students come to the end of their years of study at university level they feel less self-efficacious. In general third grade students found to be more motivated than other two graders. Perception of self-efficacy and control of learning beliefs were more favored by third graders than second and fourth graders respectively. However, senior students favored more than sophomores in terms of control of learning beliefs.

## 8. IMPLICATIONS

That sophomores, juniors and seniors were found to differ with regards their motivation is a noteworthy finding. This may suggest university students have different attrition and maintenance patterns during their courses of studies at university.

Implications of these findings for university program faculties and curriculum developers are legion. Having a stronger understanding of attrition patterns and factors that redound to motivational beliefs will help teachers and educators obviate the impediments of EFL students. Apprised by the fact that seniors may experience a slight decrease in their motivation, teachers and educators might heed extra attention to edifying seniors' beliefs, such that activities of EFL students will not be diminished in their final years of university.

Self-efficacy is considered as a *mélange* of beliefs congregated by experiences over the time. However, motivation appeared to whittle away through junior students to the seniors. These findings suggest more other contributors may indeed be liable reasons; suggesting that researchers should include all other measures in their studies.

A sampling larger than this and an empirical qualitative study is felt for. Results are also prone to disturbance influenced by social bias toward the social learning environments, reasons of learning and mastering and et cetera.

*Affective* components (Test Anxiety) and *value component* subscale for its three sub-categories labeled *intrinsic goal orientation*, *extrinsic goal orientation* and *task value* can be supplemented or exchanged for future study likewise.

Attributes and factors other than grade like gender, students' interest, reasons for study, teacher's role, complexity of required tasks, learner's performance, peer pressure, time and effort allotted to a task and metacognitive awareness influencing self-efficacy beliefs within the field of English language learning can be subject of future study.

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